Mt. Culmen Clarion

A Newsletter of Mt. Culmen EC Church

*"What I tell you in the dark, say in the light;
and what you hear whispered, shout from the rooftops!"*

Volume 7 - Issue 4 - April 2024

Pastor
Rev. Jonathan J. Brown
717-205-6532

Lay Delegate
Rebekah Brown

Alternate Lay Delegate
Kenneth Bannon

Board President
Floyd Mast

Board Vice President
Delrea Ream

Board Secretary
Sharon Mast

Church Treasurer
Esther Stauffer

Trustees:
Floyd Mast
Barry Ream
David Rissler

Stewards:
Esther Stauffer
Joyce Garber
Kim Sweigart
Debra Brubaker

Members-at-Large:
Sharon Mast
Delrea Ream

Please visit us online at
facebook.com/MtCulmenEC

In This Sign, Conquer

– Rev. Jonathan Brown

Once upon a time, in the Roman Empire it wasn't legal to be a Christian. Then, early in the fourth century, something happened. There was a civil war going on for control of the empire, and one of the main contestants was preparing for a big battle. As the battle day neared, he had a strange experience, which he later told to his friends. It was about noon, and he looked up toward the sun high in the sky. In the blinding sunlight, he had a vision. Above the sun but separate from it, he saw a symbol made of light, and nearby he saw the words 'By this, conquer' – or, otherwise translated, 'In this sign, conquer.' So he crafted replicas of that symbol to put on all of his army's banners and shields, which he said he'd been commanded in a dream. And then he went and won the victory.

What was the symbol that so touched the Emperor Constantine's life? What symbol is it that changed history? Well, I'll tell you: the symbol in the sky was the shape of a cross.

In our church, you've probably noticed that, when we get to the end of a worship service and are singing the doxology, I have a few different gestures I make to match the words and help me focus on their meaning – gesturing low and broad for "all creatures here below," gesturing high and broad for "ye heavenly hosts." But when we "praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," you see me use my right hand to trace the shape of the cross over my head, heart, and shoulders, while raising my other hand to point at heaven.

Then, right after that, when we come to the very end, the blessing or benediction that I offer you as your pastor, I use that same right hand to make the same sign of the cross over you, the congregation. Using this sign, I bless you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and so send you back out into the world with this gesture.

This is a practice I've had for years, since before I came to Mt. Culmen to be your pastor – it's how I did the benediction at other churches before. Last month, though, I heard through the grapevine – (as too many things get heard in churches these days!) – that there might be some people in our church who don't understand what I mean by this. I heard that there were some people who had questions about this practice. I heard there were even some who felt confused by it. I heard that some people might even be offended by it! "The sign of the cross? Isn't that some kind of Catholic thing?"

It's important for the church to understand *what* we do and *why* we do what we do. This is what helps us not just be going through the motions. So let's dig into this question.

(Continued on Page 9)

Mount Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church
1885 Turkey Hill Road, East Earl, PA 17519
Sunday Morning Worship: 10:00 AM

Board Meeting Notes (March 2024)

Last month, the Official Board of Mt. Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church convened its meeting after the worship service on Sunday, March 3, 2024, to conduct the business of the church. In attendance at the meeting were 11 members of our church board: Floyd Mast, Sharon Mast, Del Ream, Barry Ream, Esther Stauffer, Joyce Garber, Dave Rissler, Debra Brubaker, Ken Bannon, Rev. Jonathan Brown, and Rebekah Brown.

Opening with prayer and roll call, the board heard the customary reports.
Of these, the treasurer's report submitted by Esther Stauffer noted:

- February 2024 income of $3,815.00
- February 2024 expenses of $3,320.05
- a February 29 ending balance of $6,542.26

The secretary's report was accepted unanimously on the motion of Dave Rissler, seconded by Ken Bannon.
The treasurer's report was accepted unanimously on the motion of Rebekah Brown, seconded by Joyce Garber.

The stewards had no report, but did discuss the then-upcoming Communion service for Easter Sunday (March 31), in advance of which, the board was informed, steward Joyce Garber would train new steward Debra Brubaker in the tasks of preparing the altar for the Eucharistic celebration and assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion.

The trustees reported that trustee Brenna Pammer, recently elected at the January congregational meeting, had opted to step down from her new role and from her position on the Official Board. Our church bylaws dictate that "any vacancy shall be filled by the remaining trustees until the next annual congregational meeting, at which time the congregation shall elect a trustee to fill the unexpired term." Therefore, at an upcoming trustee meeting, the trustees would hold an election for a new trustee for 2024, and the January 2025 congregational meeting will elect someone to fill out the remainder of Brenna's unexpired term (until January 2027).

Under the heading of old business, the board discussed the then-upcoming Pancake Breakfast event (*on which, see pages 4-7*). Esther first made mention of the shift in date for manufacturing peanut butter and coconut cream eggs, which had been rescheduled to Friday, March 15, 2024. Esther additionally reported that she had reached out to Deb Erdman regarding sausages. We were seeking 160 this year (as Ken Bannon noted, "I would rather have too much around than run out"), and Deb said she would give us 175, which Esther would pick up at Green Dragon on Good Friday while delivering Deb Erdman's order of 6 dozen peanut butter eggs. On that note, Esther inquired whether the board was comfortable keeping the egg price at $12/dozen; and, by consensus, the board said yes.

Esther further said that, as of the board meeting date (March 3), everything on our sign-up sheet had been covered except for tablecloth and a bit of dark chocolate, and she did not expect getting those to be a problem. She also asked if anyone would help scatter Easter eggs for the egg hunt. Pastor Jonathan and Rebekah eagerly volunteered.

In a last item of old business, Del Ream raised the question of the planned HVAC renovations to the fellowship hall, asking whether we shouldn't upgrade our air conditioners sooner rather than later, before the summer weather arrives and we have need of it. Floyd Mast answered that the trustees will have to meet to prepare a proposal. Del observed that the church will have to pay a significant sum for the project and will need time to raise funds. However, Floyd affirmed that the trustees have the responsibility of voting on a proposal to submit to the board. The trustees, he added, would convene that meeting immediately following the close of our present board meeting.

Under the heading of new business, the board first heard from Pastor Jonathan regarding some upcoming plans. He said that he would be taking a week of vacation time from March 5-12 to visit the Maryland suburbs of Washington DC, and that for the Sunday of that week (March 10), EC deacon Barry Heckman would fill in as our guest preacher. Next, he said that he would be taking a week of vacation time from May 8-14, taking his mother on a beach trip for Mother's Day. For that Sunday (May 12), he would submit the matter to our district field director Keith Miller to find a suitable guest preacher to join us in a worship service.

(Continued on Page 3)

(Continued from Page 2, "Board Meeting Notes")

Finally, Pastor Jonathan announced his intention to take his annual spiritual renewal week from June 5-12, to attend a theology conference in Minnesota for which he had registered. (The conference is focusing on the theology of creation, giving Pastor Jonathan a chance to reflect more deeply on some of the themes we've covered so far in our sermon series in the Book of Genesis.) That time will cover our next church yard sale, as the board had previously scheduled it as a recurring event for the second Saturday of each June, which this year will fall on June 8. For our worship service the very next day – Sunday, June 9, 2024 – Pastor Jonathan had a suggestion to present to the board.

The other month, our church had gotten a mailing from a local band, the Good News Travelin' Band, led by Brian and Donna Miller; Brian is the son of the late Melvin 'Sonny' Miller, of Sonny Miller and the Happy Valley Boys, while Donna's father played steel guitar in the Allentown-area County Rainbows. The Good News Travelin' Band specializes in country, gospel, and bluegrass renditions of hymns, and in their letter, they noted that one thing they do is come to churches to lead worship in their special way. Pastor Jonathan therefore proposed that, since the climate should be appropriate, perhaps we could arrange to have a June 9 service in the pavilion during his absence, at which the Good News Travelin' Band could play and share their testimonies as the message.

Several members of the board said that the idea was an interesting one, but that any commitment would have to be contingent on what they would charge. Pastor Jonathan said that he had been attempting to reach the Millers to ask that very question so that he could bring it before the board, but hadn't gotten an answer to his email yet. Pastor Jonathan asked the board to consider what limit they would be okay with him agreeing to on the church's behalf. Esther noted that we usually pay a guest preacher $100 anyway; Pastor Jonathan and Rebekah clarified that several years ago, National Conference increased the required amount for a guest preacher to $150. Pastor Jonathan noted that, as a band, we might also want to think of this event as comparable to the band we get for our picnic. For that, Esther said, she usually aims at $100/person in the band as what we try to give. Joyce Garber asked whether we shouldn't be paying a band (if they also give a message) more than we'd pay for a guest preacher alone.

In the end, with the board not being certain off-hand of how many members the Good News Travelin' Band has but assuming two (*N.B.: actually, the full band has four members*), Esther proposed that $300 would be the maximum we would want to pay for a Sunday morning service – although, Pastor Jonathan noted, our intent would be to also advertise this special service to the public and hopefully draw a larger-than-usual crowd. After further discussion, Barry Ream moved that we begin with a $300 offer and go from there; this was seconded by Esther and passed by the board unanimously. (*N.B.: Pastor Jonathan did subsequently get in touch with the Good News Travelin' Band, who requested $300; Pastor Jonathan therefore booked them and said that we would also have a special free-will offering taken up to provide for the band beyond the $300 minimum.*)

Finally, Floyd Mast reported to the board an unusual situation with respect to our church cemetery. We had sold a plot to a man who died some time ago, was cremated, but had not yet been buried. Now, his family is prepared for the interment, but desires to dig the grave themselves so as to reduce costs. Ordinarily, we have a professional we use for gravedigging, to ensure that there are no problems and that any liability is covered. The question before the board was whether we should allow non-professional gravedigging in our cemetery. Ken Bannon inquired whether we didn't use to have a cemetery committee that handled such questions. Floyd answered that there was once a cemetery committee, of which Amos Arment was the head; however, this issue had never come up before.

Pastor Jonathan observed that there may well be laws or local regulations governing questions like these; and that, while church-owned cemeteries are technically exempted from certain regulations, it would be safest to verify what law generally applies to such cases, if any. Rebekah suggested that the trustees contact a local funeral home for guidance before we make a decision. Floyd agreed that that was the better course of action.

There being no further business after that, on motion of Barry Ream, as seconded by Dave Rissler,
the board adjourned its meeting, to reconvene following the worship service on **Sunday, April 7, 2024**;
meanwhile, the trustees commenced their own meeting.

Pancake and Sausage Breakfast and Easter Egg Hunt

Thanks to all who helped with our Holy Saturday (March 30) breakfast and egg hunt! We raised $1,953.45 this year.

(Continued on Page 5)

(Continued from Page 4, "Breakfast and Egg Hunt")

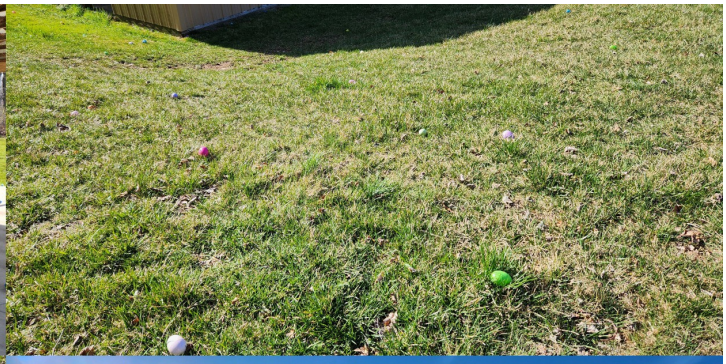
(Continued on Page 6)

(Continued from Page 5, “Breakfast and Egg Hunt”)

We're so glad we had the chance to spend time with so many of you, and we thank God for such a lovely day!

(Continued on Page 7)

(Continued from Page 6, “Breakfast and Egg Hunt”)



Upcoming Community Events

- **Messiah Sing-a-Long** – On Wednesday, **April 5**, 2024, at 7:00pm, Westminster Presbyterian Church (2151 Oregon Pike, Lancaster) will host a singalong Handel's 1741 oratorio *Messiah*. Cost to be there is free, but there's a freewill offering, and scores can be rented for $10 or bought for $15.
- **Breakfast** – On Saturday, **April 6**, 2024, from 6:00am to 10:00am, the Bareville Fire Hall (211 East Main Street, Leola) will be serving an all-you-can-eat breakfast of dry beef gravy, pancakes, toast, sausage, bacon, eggs, fried potatoes, fruit, shoofly pie, etc. – $12/adult. Also, buy chicken corn soup at $8/quart!
- **Concerts** – Also on Saturday, **April 6**, 2024, at 7:00pm, the Garden Spot Village Chapel (433 South Kinzer Avenue, New Holland) will host a vocal concert by mezzo soprano Vickie Kissinger. She will be followed the next night, **April 7**, by the violin-and-piano duo Jonathan Tice and Frances Dost, same place and time.
- **Plain Living Educational Series** – This April, the Garden Spot Village Chapel will also host, at 7:00pm:
  - **April 8** – "Gifts for Relief: From White Horse to the World" – local Amish historian Ken Sensenig will discuss an Amish-operated nonprofit which provides supplies for international aid organizations
  - **April 15** – "Amish Ag Exchange: Lancaster and Tanzania" – Joe Miller and Dale Stoltzfus will discuss how the Amish community welcomed a Tanzanian couple to share insight into farming practices
  - Then, on Thursday, **April 18**, the New Holland Area Historical Society will follow these up with an educational program on "The Women of Amish History," at the same time (7:00pm) and place.
- **Blood Drive** – On Tuesday, **April 9**, 2024, Fivepointville Fire Company (1087 Dry Tavern Road, Denver) is hosting a Community Blood Drive from 11:00am to 7:00pm. Can you donate blood? Appointments are preferred (call 1-800-771-0059), but walk-ins are welcome.
- **Band Concerts** – On Saturday, **April 13**, 2024, at 7:00pm at Garden Spot Village Chapel, the New Holland Band will present in concert "The Art of the March," exploring band marches through the years. This one isn't free; tickets cost $15/each. But the following Saturday, **April 20**, will be a free concert by Flipside Big Band at the same time and place.
- **Community Meal** – On Monday, **April 22**, 2024, 5:30pm to 6:30pm, CrossNet Ministries will provide a free community meal at their youth center (110 West Franklin Street, New Holland).
- **I'll Fly Away** – On Wednesday, **April 24**, 2024, at 7:00pm at Garden Spot Village Chapel, the Servant Stage Company will present their gospel/music tribute concert "I'll Fly Away," featuring many great hymns.
- **Taste of New Holland Food Fest** – On Friday, **April 26**, 2024, from 4:00pm to 8:00pm, and then Saturday, **April 27**, from 3:00pm to 8:00pm, the Garden Spot Fire Rescue lot (339 East Main Street, New Holland) will be the scene of a major food fest! Raising money for the local fire company, there'll be a variety of food trucks, live music from Hit Show, and prize giveaways.

Statistical Report (February 2024)

	Worship Service Attendance		Offerings Received
02/04/24	26		$1,240.00
02/11/24	23		$680.00
02/18/24	21		$860.00
02/25/24	22		$1,035.00
Average:	23	Total:	$3,815.00

Birthdays (April 2024)		Anniversaries (April 2024)
4/1 – Floyd Heuyard	4/11 – Red Baxter	4/3 – Robert and Kim Horning
4/24 – Debra Brubaker	4/27 – Linda Musser	4/10 – David and Miriam Rissler
4/28 – Don Mellinger	4/29 – Violet Stauffer	4/28 – Earl and Pauline Good

(Continued from Page 1, "In This Sign, Conquer")

So, the first question is: "The sign of the cross – isn't that a Catholic thing?" Well, that depends on what it is we mean by 'a Catholic thing.' We could just mean, "a thing that Catholics do." If that's what we mean, then absolutely the sign of the cross is a Catholic thing. Other Catholic things, by this definition, include reading the Bible, praying to God, singing hymns, serving the poor... By this definition, a lot of 'Catholic things' are simply 'Christian things' in general, 'Christian things' universally. If that's what we mean, then there's no problem here at all.

On the other hand, maybe by 'a Catholic thing,' we mean "something uniquely Catholics do." If that's what we mean by 'a Catholic thing,' then there are two things worth saying. First, even if a practice is something Catholics came up with, that doesn't *in itself* mean we couldn't or shouldn't learn from it. At the Last Supper, the Gospel of John tells us about a special prayer Jesus prayed for his apostles, *"that they may be one, even as we* [i.e., Jesus and his Father] *are one"* (John 17:11). But Jesus didn't just pray for his twelve apostles. He prayed *"also for those who will believe in me through their word"* (John 17:20). That's all disciples, that's all Christians! So what was Jesus' prayer for all Christians? It was this: *"That* ***they may all be one****, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you"* (John 17:21).

Jesus' prayer was that there wouldn't be a bunch of separate churches, but just one Church, in the same way he and his Father aren't different gods but only one God. Jesus wants his believers to be *deeply* united. Loving Jesus means we should want what Jesus wants. Therefore, if we love Jesus, then we will want all Christians to be deeply united. If we want that, then we will work for it: we will actively pursue Christian unity! And part of that pursuit, in an age of divided Christianities, means being willing to share and learn from each other. We Evangelicals have ideas and customs that other Christians could definitely benefit from! So we should expect other Christian groups to have gifts that can teach us and enrich us – things it would be at least okay, and maybe even very helpful, for us to adopt.

So *even if* the sign of the cross were something unique to one group of Christians – and that includes Catholics – that doesn't mean it has to stay just 'a Catholic thing.' Our denomination hasn't always remembered that well. We've nurtured *a lot* of anti-Catholic prejudice in the past, to the point of cozying up to the anti-Catholic KKK. (As the EC Church's archivist, I've held in my hand a letter from the 1920s where our founding bishop declared that "a number of our ministers are interested in the Klan," said his personal "attitude toward the Klan is sympathetic," and admitted to being a faithful reader of a magazine which just five years earlier had defended a Klansman's murder of a Catholic priest.[1]) I'd like to think we've repented of that shameful attitude! I'd like to think we finally realized that *"if anyone says 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar"* (1 John 4:20). Whatever disagreements there are that stoke our Christian divisions, we have brothers and sisters in Christ on the other side. If a *good* Christian practice starts up among Catholics, then we'd be *failing to love Jesus well* if we let our handed-down prejudices get in the way of receiving Jesus' gifts even from the places we neglected to expect.

But *in fact*, the sign of the cross isn't unique to Catholics. I myself didn't learn the sign of the cross from Catholics; I learned it when I lived in Greece, and it was taught to me by Greek Orthodox Christians. Trust me, if you ever visit an Orthodox church to worship the Lord there, you won't be able to go more than a couple minutes without seeing somebody make the sign of the cross. They do it *way* more than any Catholic church I've ever seen!

Anglicans – or Episcopalians, as we often call them here – also make the sign of the cross. Before the Reformation, English Christians were bound by church rules which listed certain times in the liturgy when *everybody* had to make the sign of the cross; but the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* decided that, when it came to "crossing... and other gestures, they may be used or left as every man's devotion serveth." It became more optional, in their approach. You will still likely see an Episcopal priest make the sign of the cross at some point during their liturgy, and Anglican writers have defended the practice as something worth doing.[2] I should note that my mentor at my first pastorate (Rev. Greg Dimick) came from an Episcopal background, prided himself on still being an Episcopal communicant in good standing even as an EC pastor, and was (I recall) quite comfortable with the sign of the cross in EC ministry.

(Continued on Page 10)

1 William F. Heil, letter to John A. Hess, undated [likely early 1926], in W. F. Heil Papers, EC Church Archives, Myerstown.

2 "The Sign of the Cross: What It Is and Why It Matters," *Anglican Compass*, 22 August 2018. <https://anglicancompass.com/the-sign-of-the-cross/>.

(Continued from Page 9, "In This Sign, Conquer")

Martin Luther, the early Protestant Reformer from Germany, also kept the practice of making the sign of the cross. In his *Small Catechism*, Lutherans were taught that "in the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say, 'In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, amen,'" and that they should do the same at the start of their prayers "in the evening, when you go to bed."[3] And, to this day, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – the largest American Lutheran group – suggests the sign of the cross at various times in Lutheran worship services, observing that "as this invocation is made, an increasing number of Lutherans trace the sign of the cross over their bodies. … The sign of the cross is ecumenical, in that it is used by the Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, and is slowly increasing in use among mainline Protestants."[4]

They're right about that last bit: the practice has indeed spread to other historic Protestant traditions, too. Although John Calvin notoriously disliked the sign of the cross, a few Presbyterians have begun to make it, though it still isn't very common among them. And even United Methodists make the sign of the cross sometimes. Having gone to a Methodist seminary, I can tell you that my penchant for making the sign of the cross didn't make me feel like I stood out. (I had plenty of other reasons for sticking out like a sore thumb, but that wasn't one of them!) The United Methodist Church's own official content encourages the sign of the cross as a devotional practice:

> The ancient and enduring power of the sign of the cross is available for us to use as United Methodists more abundantly now than ever in our history. And more and more United Methodists are expanding its use beyond those suggested in our official ritual. If you haven't explored how the sign of the cross may be valuable in your worship and devotional life, you may want to consider giving it a try.[5]

Are they right about that? Should we be giving this a try (as we have been)? They say this sign has an "ancient and enduring power." So where exactly does the sign of the cross come from, and why? That's the next big question.

Looking back, Christians actually saw several precedents in the Old Testament for being marked or imprinted with the sign of the cross. **First** of all, there was the story of the very first Passover (we just talked about this on Easter!). In order for Israel to be set free from Egypt, God commanded they sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed lamb onto the door frame of each and every Hebrew home (Exodus 12:7). This, God tells Moses, was *"a **sign** for you, on the houses where you are, and when I see this blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you"* (Exodus 12:13). The idea was that this physical sign was a symbol of protection through the blood of the lamb, expressing Israel's faith in the protective power of that sacrifice. And so, looking back, making the sign of the cross came to be seen as a Christian way to 'paint' ourselves with the blood of the True Lamb over and over again, thus expressing the Church's constant faith in the protective power of Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross.[6]

Second, when the Amalekites then attacked Israel in the desert at Rephidim, Moses sent Joshua to lead the actual battle against Amalek, while Moses himself stretched out his arms to either side in blessing over Israel, holding his wooden staff (Exodus 17:8-11). And the Book of Exodus makes a point to be specific about how Moses held his arms: *"Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the going down of the sun, and Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword"* (Exodus 17:12-13). Some of the very earliest Christians read this story as Moses having "formed the sign of the cross."[7] That is, Moses stood in a cross-shape, and that's what blessed Israel with victory in battle when they were led by Joshua (the same name, in Hebrew, as 'Jesus')! To Christians, this story was an example of how a bodily gesture showing the form of Christ crucified could be a powerful symbol of the victory Christ gives God's people over their oppressors.

(Continued on Page 11)

3 Luther's *Small Catechism* is available online, and this section is at <https://catechism.cph.org/en/daily-prayers.html>.

4 "Why Do Lutherans Make the Sign of the Cross?", *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, <https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Why_do_Lutherans_make_the_sign_of_the_cross.pdf>.

5 "Ask the UMC: Why Don't We Make the Sign of the Cross?", 7 August 2019. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-why-dont-united-methodists-make-the-sign-of-the-cross>.

6 *Apostolic Tradition* 42A.3-4, in *Popular Patristics Series* 22:160.

7 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 90.5, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 6:292.

(Continued from Page 10, "In This Sign, Conquer")

Third, in Moses' last sermon to Israel, he tells them to take the written words of the covenant and to *"bind them as a **sign** on your arm, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes"* (Deuteronomy 6:8). In preaching that, Moses was only repeating what he'd said much earlier in discussing the feast, that the message of their deliverance out of slavery *"shall be to you as a **sign** on your hand and a **memorial** between your eyes, that the Law of the LORD may be in your mouth"* (Exodus 13:9). Many religious Jews to this day observe this literally, wearing small boxes known as *tefillin* or phylacteries during certain prayer services (cf. Matthew 23:5). Among other things, they're a physical reminder, placed on a Jewish believer's body, which signifies the submission of mind, strength, and voice to the word of God. And so it was only natural, later on, for the sign of the cross to be seen as something like a Christian *tefillah*, a physical gesture made on our body to signify submission of mind, heart, strength, and voice to the word of God.

Fourth, in the visions of Ezekiel, the prophet sees a scene of judgment against Jerusalem, and he hears the LORD tell the executioners to *"pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a **mark** on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it"* (Ezekiel 9:4). Just like on the original Passover, only those who were marked for God as part of this aggrieved remnant would be spared in the judgment (Ezekiel 9:6). This mark is a protective mark. Now, the curious thing here is that the word for 'mark' is also the name of the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet: *tav.* And in the old Hebrew script of that time, guess what a *tav* was shaped like? A cross! This thread from Ezekiel is picked up at the end of the New Testament, where those who stand with the Lamb (i.e., Jesus) have *"his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads"* (Revelation 14:1). And so, taking their cue from Revelation, Christians came to read this vision of Ezekiel as foretelling the mark of the cross on Christians' foreheads being a sign of protection, a protest against a world of corruption and sin.[8]

So that covers the Old Testament. The New Testament itself doesn't explicitly refer to an early gesture of the sign of the cross as a gesture. The Apostle Paul does, though, cryptically tell the Galatians that *"before your eyes, Jesus Christ was openly depicted as having been crucified"* (Galatians 3:1). Most likely, Paul is referring to the effect of his evangelistic preaching, 'opening their eyes' to what they had seen in the Old Testament scriptures.[9] But given that he sarcastically contrasts the cross here with the evil eye (a popular superstition in those days), Paul is suggesting that somehow looking to the cross, *seeing* the cross, is a protection against spiritual deception and spiritual harm.[10]

After Paul's time, the earliest Christian hymns we have outside the Bible, written around the end of the first century and start of the second, are the *Odes of Solomon*. In one, Christians sing that "I believed in the Lord's Messiah... and he declared to me his **sign**, and he led me by his light."[11] Less than half a century after that – we're talking the middle of the second century – another Christian book called the *Epistle of the Apostles* imagines Jesus describing the Second Coming: "I will come as the sun that shines, and shining seven times brighter than it in my brightness. With the wings of the clouds carrying me in splendor and **the sign of the cross** before me, I will come down to the earth to judge the living and the dead."[12] The same thing was said earlier in the very popular *Apocalypse of Peter.*[13]

Neither of those references is to a bodily gesture yet. But the *Odes* do in fact also refer to a bodily posture Christians can make – stretching out their arms, like Moses did – as a 'sign' of the cross: "The expansion of my hands is his **sign**, and my extension is the upright cross."[14] Or, in a different ode: "I extended my hands and approached my Lord, because the stretching out of my hands is his **sign**, and my extension is the common/upright cross that was lifted up on the way of the Righteous One."[15] At this point, apparently, some Christians prayed and sang by standing with their arms outstretched, and called this custom making 'the sign of the cross.'

(Continued on Page 12)

8 Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Marcion* 3.22, in Ernest Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 241.
9 Jerome of Stridon, *Commentary on Galatians* 1 3:1b, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 121:119-120; Frank P. Matera, *Galatians* (Liturgical Press, 1992), 112; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 120-121.
10 Peter Oakes, *Galatians* (Baker Academic, 2015), 102-103.
11 *Odes of Solomon* 29.6-7, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2:761.
12 *Epistle of the Apostles* 16 (Coptic version), in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Clarendon Press, 1993), 566.
13 *Apocalypse of Peter* 1, in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Clarendon Press, 1993), 600.
14 *Odes of Solomon* 27.2-3, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2:759.
15 *Odes of Solomon* 42.1-2, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2:770.

(Continued from Page 11, "In This Sign, Conquer")

By the end of the second century and into the third, it becomes obvious that making the sign of the cross as a different sort of gesture has become an established Christian practice for a while, whether instead of or alongside what the ode-singing churches did. Tertullian, a Christian convert living in Carthage in northern Africa, explains that Christians "make the **sign of the cross** on our foreheads at every turn, at our going in and coming out of the house, while dressing, while putting on our shoes, when we are taking a bath, before and after meals, when we light the lamps, when we go to bed or sit down, and in all the ordinary actions of daily life."[16] Tertullian takes it fully for granted that a Christian's daily routine will involve "making the **sign of the cross** on your bed [and] on your body."[17]

Not long after Tertullian's time, a different writer, living in Rome around the 230s, describes the way that the sign of the cross played a role in the rituals by which people became Christians: "Pouring the sanctified oil from [the bishop's] hand and putting it on [the new believer's] head, he shall say: 'I anoint you with holy oil in God the Father Almighty and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit.' And, **signing** him on the forehead, he shall give him the kiss and say, 'The Lord be with you.' And he who has been signed shall say, 'And with your spirit.'"[18]

But the sign of the cross wasn't only for the start of a person's life of faith. The same Roman writer has this advice for all Christians: "If you are tempted, reverently **sign yourself** on the forehead. For the **sign of the passion** is displayed against the devil, if it is made in faith and not to please people, but through the emblem, putting it before you as a shield. For if the Adversary sees the power of the Spirit from the heart being outwardly demonstrated in the likeness of baptism, he will flee away trembling... By **signing** forehead and eyes with the hand, we shall escape the one who is seeking our destruction."[19] Christians were using the sign of the cross as spiritual self-defense! Around the same time, across the Mediterranean Sea in Alexandria (on the north Egyptian coast), a Christian teacher named Origen made a reference to "the **sign** placed on the forehead of all Christians, which all believers make when beginning any activity at all, especially prayer or holy readings."[20]

So what can we say about this point, only two centuries after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead? The sign of the cross is said to be a universal practice made on every Christian's forehead as part of the rituals around baptism. It is also a gesture that Christians universally make when they pray or when they read from Scripture. It is a gesture that Christians commonly make to invoke Christ over many elements of their daily routine, numerous times every day. And it is a gesture which church leaders advise Christians to make to guard against temptation, because in this gesture, which links back to what Jesus does in each Christian at baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit is brought to bear for our protection. Again, all of this was associated with the sign of the cross within the first seven generations of Christians. People who were disciples of disciples of disciples of the apostles were wild for this sign!

Then, as the fourth century begins, we hear from Lactantius, a native of north Africa who converted to Christianity and for a while taught rhetoric at the pagan imperial court. He defines Christians as "all who make upon their foreheads the mark of blood – that is, the **mark of the cross** on which he [i.e., Jesus] shed that blood."[21] Lactantius also refers to it as "that great and lofty mark of baptism."[22] He goes on to say: "How great the mark's potency is! The terror it causes to demons will be known to anyone who's seen how far those conjured in the name of Christ flee from the bodies they beset. When he was at work among men, he could rout all demons with a word and could restore minds disturbed and maddened by evil attacks to their former senses himself. Now it is his followers who free people from the same spirits of defilement in their Master's name and the **sign of his suffering**."[23] According to Lactantius, Christians were using the sign-of-the-cross gesture in exorcism – and it was working!

(Continued on Page 13)

16 Tertullian of Carthage, *On the Military Crown* 3.4, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 40:237.
17 Tertullian of Carthage, *To His Wife* 2.5, in *Ancient Christian Writers* 13:30.
18 *Apostolic Tradition* 21.22-24, in *Popular Patristics Series* 22:112.
19 *Apostolic Tradition* 42A.1-4, in *Popular Patristics Series* 22:160.
20 Origen of Alexandria, fragment on Ezekiel 9:4, in Mischa Hooker, tr., *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel* (Chieftain Publishing, 2014), 537.
21 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.26.39, in *Translated Texts for Historians* 40:273.
22 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.26.36, in *Translated Texts for Historians* 40:272.
23 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.27.1-2, in *Translated Texts for Historians* 40:273.

(Continued from Page 12, "In This Sign, Conquer")

I think it's important to realize that all these testimonies so far are from the time of the persecuted church, and at a time when our understanding of the Trinity was still in its infancy. Then, in the fourth century, Christianity emerged from the shadows. In Jerusalem, a decade after Lactantius died, a teacher named Cyril left us lectures to teach new Christians all they should know. He encouraged them to "seal [the cross] openly on your brow, that the demons, seeing **the royal sign**, may tremble and flee far away. Make this sign when eating and drinking, when sitting, lying down, rising, speaking, or walking – in a word, on every occasion."[24] Cyril repeated himself in a later lecture:

> Let us not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Let the cross, as our seal, be boldly made with our fingers upon our brow, and upon all occasions: over the bread we eat, over the cups we drink, in our comings and in our goings, before sleep, on lying down and rising up, when we are on the way, and when we are still. It is a powerful safeguard! It is without price, for the sake of the poor; without toil, because of the sick; for it is a grace from God, a badge of the faithful, and a terror to devils, for *'he displayed them openly, leading them away in triumph by force of it'* [Colossians 2:15]. For when they see the cross, they are reminded of the Crucified; they fear him who has smashed the heads of the dragons. Despise not the seal as a free gift, but rather, for this reason, honor your Benefactor at all times.[25]

Back in Alexandria, a preacher named Athanasius – in a book he wrote about the difference Jesus makes to the world – announced that "the demons no longer deceive with fantasies and oracles and magic, but if they dare and try, they are put to shame by the **sign of the cross**."[26] In Italy, a politician-turned-bishop named Ambrose taught: "The Lord sealed you and placed the Holy Spirit in your heart.... How? Because you were sealed unto the **form of the cross** itself, unto his passion. You have received the seal unto his likeness, that you may rise again unto his form, may live unto his figure, who was crucified to sin and lives to God."[27] And in Turkey, the dynamic bishop Basil said that this custom whereby "those who hope in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ are marked with the **sign of the cross**" was known to be one which Christians had "received in mystery as the teachings of the tradition of the apostles."[28]

Meanwhile, a Roman soldier named Martin, while serving in France, became a Christian. He refused to carry weapons any more, and was denounced as a coward. He retorted, "In the name of the Lord Jesus and protected only by the **sign of the cross**, without shield or helmet, I shall penetrate the enemy's ranks and not be afraid!"[29] After quitting the Roman army and becoming a bishop, Martin was later attacked by people who tried to crush him with a tree. "It now began to crash upon him when he finally raised his hand and made the **sign of salvation** in its direction. The tree – and you would have likened its backward action to a tornado – crashed in just the opposite direction... The pagans, stupefied by the miracle, raised a great shout to heaven.... It is generally agreed that salvation came to that region on that day."[30] No wonder Jerome, a monk who moved from the Balkans to Syria to Rome to Bethlehem, advised Christians: "At every act, at every step, the hand should make the **sign of the cross**!"[31]

As the fifth century got started, Augustine – an influential bishop in north Africa – described "the cross on the open forehead" as "the sign of the new covenant."[32] In it, "the whole Christian life is defined: to perform good works in Christ and cling to him perseveringly..."[33] "What jewel in the crown of rulers is more precious than the cross of Christ on their foreheads?", he asked.[34] Then the Roman bishop Leo explained that "all who have been regenerated in Christ are made kings by the **sign of the cross** and are consecrated priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit."[35]

(Continued on Page 14)

24 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.14, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 61:126.
25 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 13.36, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 64:28.
26 Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 55, in *Popular Patristics Series* 44A:169.
27 Ambrose of Milan, *On the Sacraments* 6.2 §§6-7, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 44:320-321.
28 Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27 §66, in *Popular Patristics Series* 42:104.
29 Sulpicius Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin* 4, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 7:109.
30 Sulpicius Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin* 13, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 7:121.
31 Jerome of Stridon, *Letter* 22.37.2, in *Ancient Christian Writers* 33:173.
32 Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 160.6, in *The Works of Saint Augustine* III/5:132.
33 Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.41 §62, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 2:115.
34 Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 51.2, in *Works of Saint Augustine* III/3:21.
35 Leo the Great, *Sermon* 4.1, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 93:25.

(Continued from Page 13, "In This Sign, Conquer")

Now, that's all well and good as history – and for me, you know, history matters a whole lot. (Give me that *really* old-time religion, please – it's good enough for me!) But still, we have to ask: today, can the sign of the cross really be, not just 'a Catholic thing' or 'a history thing,' but 'an Evangelical thing'? Can it be *our* thing? Is that okay?

To answer that, first take a look around our church next time you're sitting in your pew. What do you see? Facing front, you'll see a small metallic cross positioned centrally atop the altar. Turn your head right, and you'll see a larger wooden cross beside the organ. Keep spinning around, and you'll see a similar wooden cross beside the back table where you get your bulletins. There's a third wooden cross a lot like those two outside the church, facing the street, which we've recently decorated for the Easter season. And when our current church building first opened, "a large cross in the bell tower is lighted at night and can be seen for miles in the valley below the church."[36] Stand across the street and look up at the church: that cross-shaped window is still there, waiting to bless the neighborhood!

Now, the Bible never outright *says* to make crosses of wood or gold or light. But we do it, and it's *good* that we do it. Well, what's good for crosses made of wood or gold is also true of crosses we trace by our gestures. The idea of all these symbolic crosses is to point us back, time and again, to focus on Christ crucified. Isn't that at the very heart of the gospel? *"I decided to know nothing among you,"* Paul writes, *"except Jesus Christ and him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 2:2). To those of us who are being saved, *"the word of the cross... is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18). Well, if the *word* of the cross is the power of God, why wouldn't the *sign* of the cross be the power of God?

In our church, when we make the sign of the cross over ourselves in devotion, or we receive it being made over us in benediction, what else are we saying but what the Apostle Paul says in the Bible? *"I have been crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). *"Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world!"* (Galatians 6:14).

And then, don't we Evangelicals sing hymns about how important the cross is to us? In one beloved hymn, we sing how much we "love that old cross where the Dearest and Best for a world of lost sinners was slain."[37] Well, if we love the original cross, won't we love its signs – whether built of wood, lit from a window, or traced with the hand? In another great hymn, isn't one of our profoundest Evangelical meditations all about "surveying the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died," and so, in our mind's eye, to "see, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down?"[38] Well, when the sign of the cross is made over you, look! You're being invited to survey the wondrous cross! You're being welcomed to bathe your heart in that mingled sorrow-and-love of your Savior!

In another of our Evangelical hymns (a less familiar one), we boast that we "glory" in the cross of Christ, which "glows with peace and joy." We add that "from the cross, the radiance streaming adds more luster to the day."[39] That, after all, is why we put that cross-shaped window in the bell tower. But it's also what's happening when the sign of the cross is made over you at the benediction. The cross of Christ, in which we glory, shines through the sign just as light shines through a window. The sign of the cross streams the radiant joy and peace of Christ all over you!

In still another hymn, we open by singing that "beneath the cross of Jesus, I fain would take my stand."[40] 'Fain' is an old word meaning 'eagerly,' 'keenly,' 'gladly.' We say we'd eagerly, keenly, gladly rush to stand beneath the cross of Jesus. But every Sunday at Mt. Culmen, as that sign is made at the benediction, in that moment you're all standing beneath the cross of Jesus. "I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place," the same hymn continues. When the sign is made over you, it means you're invited to abide in the cross's shadow – just like we sing about. And when I – or you, if you want – make the sign of cross as a devotional gesture, that's stepping into the cross's shadow, too.

(Continued on Page 15)

36 "Mt. Culmen EC Church to Be Dedicated Sunday," *Lancaster New Era* (24 June 1960): 10.
37 "The Old Rugged Cross," hymn #251 in *The Singing Church* hymnal.
38 "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," hymn #134 in *The Singing Church* hymnal.
39 "In the Cross of Christ I Glory," hymn #144 in *The Singing Church* hymnal.
40 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," hymn #127 in *The Singing Church* hymnal.

(Continued from Page 14, "In This Sign, Conquer")

In another of our hymns, we sing about "this triumphant sign." Well, what sign could *that* possibly be? There's just one: the sign of the cross! When you or I make the sign of the cross over ourselves in devotion, then, in the hymn's words, we're marking ourselves as "the hosts of God in conquering ranks." We're saying – in an echo of Revelation 14:1-5 – that we'll "follow where our Savior trod, our King victorious: Christ, the Son of God." When your pastor makes the sign of the cross over you as a blessing to end our assembly of worship, that sign is not just a gesture. It's a commission! Go, "lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore his sacred name!"[41]

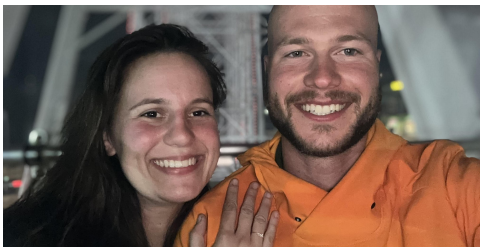
So, is making the sign of the cross – whether devotionally over ourselves, or receiving it at the benediction – a really Evangelical thing? It fits with what the Bible says – not only precedents in the Old Testament, but also the letters of Paul, one of Evangelicals' favorite parts of the Bible. It fits with what we sing in our most thoroughly Evangelical hymns. It fits well with the way we've put physical signs of the cross throughout our church building since before I ever arrived here. It even fits well with the original intention of our church tower over six decades ago. Being such a good fit with all those other things about us, why *shouldn't* the sign of the cross be our Evangelical thing?

Of course, we should bear in mind the wisdom of St. Augustine: Ultimately, "God is looking for doers of his signs, not painters of them. If you carry the sign of Christ's humility on your forehead, then carry the imitation of Christ's humility in your heart."[42] If we make the sign of the cross only as a mindless gesture which we don't *mean* (even virtually or habitually), then, yes, it will absolutely make hypocrites of us. But so will every hymn, every sermon, every prayer, every Bible verse we read or recite, and every kind deed that ought to be a fruit of the faith that works by love. The sign of the cross isn't *uniquely* a risk of becoming a vain gesture. Do it, if you choose – but mean it.

However, just like everything else we Christians do in our worship and our witness and our work, if we allow this Christian custom to *sincerely* give outward shape to faith and hope and love, and if we use it sincerely to seek and to share God's blessing in Jesus Christ, and if we expect this gestural proclamation of the cross to be the power of God at work in our lives and in the world – then watch out! This sign preaches and does the gospel! God is on the move!

So in this sign, conquer sin! In this sign, conquer doubt! In this sign, conquer temptation! In this sign, conquer the darkness! In this sign, conquer disunity! In this sign, conquer hell! In this sign, conquer lost souls with love, mercy, and grace! In this sign, conquer all in the world that sets itself up against our Crucified and Risen King of Kings! It is as evangelical a thing as we could possibly do. Hallelujah and amen: In this sign, conquer!

We want to heartily congratulate
our dear friend and sister in Christ
Savannah Loy Walker
on her recent engagement to
Will Driscoll!



Please pray that God would
bless the both of them
with strong love and matchless grace
and with a beautiful future together.

41 "Lift High the Cross," hymn #143 in *The Singing Church* hymnal.
42 Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 32.13, in *The Works of Saint Augustine* III/2:143.

Preaching Calendar (April – May 2024)

Worship services commence at 10:00 AM on Sundays. We hope to see you there with us!

April 7 (Easter 2):
Sermon Title: "Counsel for Cain"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-7
"Beset with Snares on Every Hand" (insert)
"Out of My Bondage, Sorrow, and Night" (272)

April 14 (Easter 3):
Sermon Title: "The Murderer and the Martyr"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-8, 10
"Blessed Feasts of Blessed Martyrs" (insert)
"Glory Be to Jesus" (insert)

April 21 (Easter 4):
Sermon Title: "My Brother's Keeper"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:8-10
"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (14)
"Because I Have Been Given Much" (498)

April 28 (Easter 5):
Sermon Title: "Murder and Mercy"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:8-16
"Ah, What Can I Do?" (insert) – to the tune of hymn #17
"Depth of Mercy! Can There Be" (253)

May 5 (Easter 6):
Sermon Title: "The Downward Spiral"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:16-24
"O for a Heart to Praise My God" (351)
"Who Is On the Lord's Side?" (449)

May 12 (Easter 7):
Pastor Jonathan will be on vacation May 8-14.
The pulpit will be filled by a guest preacher yet to be determined.
"Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise" (163)
"Now Thank We All Our God" (544)

May 19 (Pentecost):
Sermon Title: "Rejoicing Where the Flames Burn"
Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 16:9-12, 16-17 + 1 Peter 1:3-12
"O Spread the Tidings 'Round" (181)
"Come, Holy Ghost, Our Souls Inspire" (180)

May 26 (Pentecost 1 / Trinity):
Sermon Title: "Gifts of the Godless"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:16-22
"Glory Be to God the Father" (197)
"God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens" (44)

June 2 (Pentecost 2):
Sermon Title: "Appointment and Calling"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-2, 8, 25-26
"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" (53)
"How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" (57)

June 9 (Pentecost 3):
Pastor Jonathan will be away for a spiritual renewal week June 5-12, including attendance at a theology conference in Minnesota.
Instead of our usual service, we're planning something special:
Bring your lawn chairs for a time of outdoor worship in the pavilion with music and testimonies by the Good News Travelin' Band!

Quotes for Thought

"A good man does not have a blind eye, but he is merciful to all, even though they may be sinners. And even if persons plot against him for evil ends, by doing good this man conquers evil, being watched over by God. He loves those who wrong him as he loves his own life."

– an unknown Jewish author
Testament of Benjamin 4.2-3 (c. 150 BC), in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1:826

"Loved ones, how blessed and marvelous are the gifts of God: life in immortality, splendor in righteousness, truth in boldness, faith in confidence, self-restraint in holiness … This is the path, loved ones, in which we have found our salvation – Jesus Christ, the high priest of our offerings, the benefactor who helps us in our weaknesses. Through this one, we gaze into the heights of the heavens. Through this one, we see the reflection of his perfect and superior countenance. Through this one, the eyes of our hearts have been opened. Through this one, our foolish and darkened understanding springs up into the light. Through this one, the Master has wished us to taste the knowledge of immortality."

– St. Clement of Rome
1 Clement 35.1; 36.1-2 (c. AD 96), in *Loeb Classical Library* 24:99-101

"We affirm that the whole human world has evidence of the work of Jesus, since in it dwell the churches of God which consist of people converted through Jesus from countless evils. Moreover, the name of Jesus still takes away mental distractions from men, and demons and diseases as well, and implants a wonderful meekness and tranquility of character, and a love to mankind and a kindness and gentleness, in those who have not feigned to be Christians on account of their need of the necessities of life or some other want, but have genuinely accepted the gospel about God and Christ and the judgment to come."

– Origen of Alexandria
Against Celsus 1.67 (c. AD 248), in Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge University Press, 1953), 62

"Wherever is the Church, Christ dwells therein."

– St. Hilary of Poitiers
Commentary on Matthew 10.7 (c. AD 355), in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 125:115

"By [Scripture's] teaching authority, we are instructed... how best to teach the ignorant and correct the contemptuous, to bear each other's burdens so that we may fulfill the law of Christ. But the more each one labors in giving his neighbors support in their needs or in correcting their mistakes, the more surely may he expect in the life to come the rewards whether of peace of soul after death or of blessed immortality of body."

– the Venerable Bede
On the Temple 1.3.4 (AD 730) in *Translated Texts for Historians* 21:12

"For humankind is indeed the work of Almighty God's right hand, which that hand has enacted, and they will fill up the choir of the lost angels. For this reason, they also stand under the defense of the good angels."

– St. Hildegard of Bingen
Book of Divine Works 3.2.10 (c. AD 1170), in *Fathers of the Church: Medieval Continuation* 18:375

"Jesus was always surprising people by doing more than was expected – things not necessary to do, but lovely nonetheless. He not only healed the leper; he also touched him. … Only thus can we truly be free. Sometimes, as normal human beings, we are irritated and annoyed by rules and regulations. We don't like anyone giving us orders – least of all the government. … Wherein, then, lies our freedom? We can be free of the law only by going *beyond* it. We best give witness to Christian teaching when we serve not simply out of a sense of duty, but because the love of Christ constrains us to do more than just 'what's right,' more than custom expects or the occasion can demand. For Christians, the determinative question is not, 'What does the law require?' It is rather, 'What does love suggest?' Not 'What is correct?', but rather, 'What is Christlike to do?'"

– William Henry Bollman, pastor of First Evangelical and Reformed Church, Lancaster
"Sermon For This Week," Lancaster *Intelligencer Journal* (3 April 1954): 6

PRAYER GUIDE

- ***We praise God*** **for all the wondrous blessings he's given us, most notably the ministry of his Son (in death, resurrection, and exaltation to the Father's right hand) and the gift of his Holy Spirit; and** ***we pray*** **that God would glorify his name above all else and would bring his kingdom more fully to earth.**
- *We pray for* **our denomination, our congregation, and the church universal**, that God would bless us at all levels with faithfulness, wisdom, vision, and fortitude to earnestly labor in his vineyard.
  - *We pray particularly for* our pastor **Rev. Jonathan J. Brown** and for **our church board**.
  - *We pray also for* **our Evangelical Congregational Church leadership**: our bishop **Randy Sizemore**, executive director **Kevin Henry**, and district field director **Keith Miller**; the **Global Ministries Community** under **Ted Rathman**; the **Kingdom Extension Community** under **Mike Snedeker**; the **Church Health Community** under **Gary Kuehner**; the **Missional Alignment Community** under **Bishop Randy Sizemore**; and the **Ministerial Development Community** under **Matthew Hill**.
- *We pray for* **our missionary partners** (such as **Dan Quigley** and others), that God would keep them safe and faithful, would focus their efforts on God's work, and would grant success in accordance with his holy will.
- *We pray for* **other churches and pastors in our community**, that God would keep all congregations united in one holy faith and devoted to the ardent service of one and the same kingdom and of its King, Jesus.
- *We pray for* the **salvation of our whole community and its maturation in Christian discipleship**, knowing that there is hope in Jesus for all people and for entire communities to reflect the righteous love of God.
- *We pray for* **an end to disease outbreaks:** COVID-19, mpox, cholera, dengue, diphtheria, anthrax, flu, RSV.
- *We pray for* **those suffering in the wake of disasters around the world**, that God would have mercy:
  - *We pray for* those afflicted by natural disasters such as famine; drought in Africa; wildfires in Mexico; tornadoes in Ohio; severe storms in Brazil and Madagascar; flooding in Pakistan, Indonesia, and France; earthquakes in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea; landslides in Pakistan; and avalanches in Japan.
  - *We pray for* those afflicted by accidents such as plane crashes in Burkina Faso, Tennessee, and Virginia; bus accidents in China, Germany, and South Africa (killing 45 Christians making an Easter pilgrimage); boat accidents in Japan and Indonesia; the rally car accident in Hungary; other traffic accidents in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Wisconsin; explosions in China, Pakistan, and California; fires in Germany and elsewhere; and the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore.
- *We pray also for* **those victimized by violence and social ills**, especially the Israel-Hamas war and Russian invasion of Ukraine, that God would make his peace manifest to the injured, traumatized, and grieving.
  - *We pray additionally for* those afflicted by the Uyghur genocide in China; civil war in Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar, etc.; India-Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, Sudan-South Sudan, and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts; insurgency in Egypt, Colombia, Chad, Cameroon, Congo, the Maghreb, Nigeria, Niger, India, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Uganda, Mozambique, Pakistan, South Sudan, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Peru, and Libya; ethnic violence in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere; gang/cartel wars in Mexico, Ecuador, and Haiti; ambushes in Niger, Somalia, Armenia, and elsewhere; violence against protesters in Cuba and elsewhere; the vehicle-ramming attack in Poland; mass shootings in Germany, Somalia, Gaza, Russia, California, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania; mass stabbings in South Africa (at a monastery), Canada, Hawaii, and Illinois; bombings in Mexico, India, Somalia, Afghanistan, Chad, Pakistan, and Syria; kidnappings in Nigeria and elsewhere; crises in Gaza and Haiti; vandalism and attacks on churches; the American opioid epidemic; human rights violations (e.g., abortion and human trafficking); the rising wave of antisemitism; and the refugee crisis.
- *We pray for* all who serve and protect us, including **civic leaders**, **police**, **firefighters**, **medical responders**, and **members of the military**: May God keep them safe, just, wise, sincere, humble, and accountable.
- *We pray for* **our nation and its government** at all levels and in all branches, that God would move our leaders to repent of unjust or unmerciful practices and laws; that God would crown them with wisdom, security, peace, and civility toward all; and that God would give them godly hearts to live and govern rightly.
- *We pray for* **the persecutors and maligners of the church around the world**:
  - *We pray for* the conversion of terrorists and other people of violence into disciples of the Prince of Peace.
  - *We pray for* the wisdom of God to be made manifest to skeptics and critics.
  - *We pray for* the Spirit's boldness to fill the hearts of all believers to witness to Jesus in life and in death.

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We pray for* **the families and friends of many who have entered their rest in the past year**, including:
  - For the family of **Darryl Imler** (Leroy Stoltzfus' nephew), who entered rest on April 1, 2023.
  - For the family of **Glenn Weber**, who entered rest on April 4, 2023.
  - For the family of **Clarence Jones** (Floyd Mast's uncle), who entered rest on April 11, 2023.
  - For the family of **Linda Wonder** (Sharon Mast's stepmother), who entered rest on April 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **John Herr** (Abby Eberly's friend), who entered rest on April 29, 2023.
  - For the family of **Sherry Stoltzfus** (Esther's sister-in-law's mother), who entered rest on May 4, 2023.
  - For the family of **Jim Brubaker**, who entered rest on May 5, 2023.
  - For the family of **Clarence Bauman** (Joyce Good's brother), who entered rest on June 17, 2023.
  - For the family of **Ben Schweitzer** (Kim Sweigart's son-in-law's friend), who entered rest July 10, 2023.
  - For the family of **Mary Martin** (Abby Eberly's friend's sister), who entered rest on July 15, 2023.
  - For the family of **Ray Snader**, who entered rest on July 17, 2023.
  - For the family of **John Kendig** (Sharon Mast's brother-in-law), who entered rest on July 19, 2023.
  - For the family of **Mary Skiba** (Sally Arment's cousin), who entered rest on August 20, 2023.
  - For the family of **Ivan Zimmerman** (Ray Snader's brother-in-law), who entered rest on August 22, 2023.
  - For the family of **Della Bollinger** (Floyd Mast's aunt), who entered rest on August 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **Harley Steenhoek** (the Walkers' grandpa), who entered rest on September 2, 2023.
  - For the family of **Elsie Martin** (Jean Hess's great-aunt), who entered rest on September 8, 2023.
  - For the family of **Clarence Good** (Jean Hess's uncle), who entered rest on September 13, 2023.
  - For the family of **Luke Ringler** (Abby's son-in-law's brother), who entered rest on September 25, 2023.
  - For the family of **Pat Street** (Nancy Mountz's sister), who entered rest on September 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **Daniel Newswanger** (Mabel's husband), who entered rest on October 8, 2023.
  - For the family of **Joyce Martin** (Jean Hess's cousin), who entered rest on October 11, 2023.
  - For the family of **Shirley Riggins** (Deb Messner's mother), who entered rest on October 13, 2023.
  - For the family of **Titus Burkholder** (Leon Hess's cousin), who entered rest on October 16, 2023.
  - For the family of **Erwin Sensenig Jr.** (Sally Arment's brother), who entered rest on November 7, 2023.
  - For the family of **Henrietta Hoshauer**, who entered rest on November 18, 2023.
  - For the family of **Bob Schade** (Cindy Ruth's uncle), who entered rest on November 23, 2023.
  - For the family of **Harvey Sauder**, who entered rest on November 25, 2023.
  - For the family of **David Kulp**, who entered rest on November 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **Bill Sprecher** (Sharon Mast's uncle), who entered rest on December 4, 2023.
  - For the family of **April Shirk** (Joan Swayze's daughter), who entered rest on December 7, 2023.
  - For the family of **Evaleen Weinhold** (Joan Swayze's aunt), who entered rest on December 16, 2023.
  - For the family of **Larry Fisher** (Abby Eberly's cousin's husband), who entered rest December 29, 2023.
  - For the family of **Dot Yohn** (Shirley's daughter's mother-in-law), who entered rest on January 3, 2024.
  - For the family of **Jace London** (Cindy Ruth's neighbor's great-grandson), who entered rest Jan. 19, 2024.
  - For the family of **Lori Zimmerman**, who entered rest on January 19, 2024.
  - For the family of **Eugene Martin** (Esther Stauffer's uncle), who entered rest on January 19, 2024.
  - For the family of **Donna Rhodes** (Cindy Ruth's sister-in-law), who entered rest on January 21, 2024.
  - For the family of **Noah Sauder** (Jean Hess's cousin), who entered rest on February 3, 2024.
  - For the family of **Miriam Burkholder** (Jean Hess's cousin), who entered rest on February 26, 2024.
  - For the family of **Renaldo Angeleni** (the Hesses' friend), who entered rest on February 27, 2024.
  - For the family of **Noah Wenger** (Esther Stauffer's uncle), who entered rest on February 28, 2024.
  - For the family of **Karen Winter** (Jeff Kohl's sister-in-law), who entered rest on April 1, 2024.
    - May the Lord give immeasurable peace, strength, and comfort to all who face loss and grief.

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We pray for* **all dementia sufferers** and for **their caretakers**, that God would lighten burdens, restore clarity to injured minds, and speak directly to hearts and souls with his comfort, his peace, and the light of grace.
- *We pray for* **all suffering from cancer** – (including Randy Vandill, Cindy Ebersole, Troy Frey, Lisa Mast, Sue Stoltzfus [Lee and Martha's daughter-in-law], Doris Snader, Betty Kennedy [Del Ream's niece-in-law], Earl Martin [Miriam Rissler's brother-in-law], Brandy Rhodes [Pastor Jonathan's cousin], Gene Sensenig, Adrianne Hedges [Brenna Pammer's friend], Deana Bernardi [Floyd Mast's friend], Ray Boley [Joyce Good's friend], Matthew Lawrie [Sharon Mast's son's friend], Rev. Keith Miller, Rev. Marlin Lafferty, Rev. Don Wert, etc.) – that God shield them from pain, restore and comfort them, and bless their doctors.
- *We pray for* the **other assorted health concerns (and other needs)** of:
  - Earl and Pauline Good + John Good (Earl's brother) + David Good
  - Floyd Mast + Steven Mast (Floyd's son) + Cindy Bannon + Marilyn Wilson (Cindy's mother)
  - Barry Ream + Delores Jaxel + Clair Kohl + Jeff Kohl + Henry Kohl + Shawn and Candace Sweigart
  - Grayson Sweigart (Kim's grandson) + Cherri Snader + Jim Becker + Raymond Bannon
  - Dennis Burkholder + Wilmer Burkholder + Linda Burkholder + Mary Andrews
  - Barty Messner + Edna Binner + Ed Diem + John Grote (Esther Stauffer's friend)
  - Vera Kochel + Brandon Wilson + Floyd Heuyard + Betty Musser
  - Violet Stauffer + Paul Ford + Becky Wallace + Emma 'Tiny' Shirk
  - Jerry Felpel and Doris Getz + Dawn Acevedo (Cindy Hoffer's sister)
  - Josh Kendig (Sharon Mast's son) + Connie Dieter (Leon and Jean Hess's daughter)
  - Larsen Houck (Shirley Good's great-grandson) + Kayley Smith (the Hesses' granddaughter)
  - Ray Arment + Butch and Mike Skiba + Emily Sensenig + Jeannine Sensenig
  - Dennis Wanner (Deb Kimmel's brother) + Sharon Geib (Deb's sister)
  - Veanna Baxter + Julia Reed (Veanna's sister) + Miriam Rissler
  - Jeremy Kurman + Warren Weinhold + Jody Freeman
  - Jess Pennepacker + Charles Yingst + Ralph Mountz
  - Carl and Grace Nolt + Don Pickle + Carl Martin
  - Robert and Barbara Sparr + Rodger Whittaker
  - Elizabeth Zimmerman (John Eberly's sister)
  - Dorothy Long (Sharon Mast's boss's sister)
  - Shirley Buchanan + Alice Vidzicki
  - Madelynne Walker + Ben + Tim
  - Gloria Hoffman + Minerva Hufford
  - Troy Frey and both of his parents + Tory Lingg
  - Donna Sensenig + Larry Sensenig + Daryll Sensenig
  - Delores, Jeremiah, and Bobby Snader + Ben Doullin + Shirley Sweigart
  - Linda Talbot (Cindy Ruth's sister) + Tom Schwer (Sharon Mast's stepbrother)
  - Rebecca Lucas (the Walkers' family friend) + Rebecca Horst + Dillon Dewire
  - Ken Keen and Nancy Fox (Floyd Mast's friends) + Barb (Anita Boley's friend)
  - Ken Styer + Bret Hoffert + Jethro Hursh + Larry and Cookie White (the Hesses' friends)
  - Linda Sweitzer (Abby Eberly's friend) + Bob Buckwalter (Abby's friend's husband)
  - Kathryn Shirk (Jean Hess's aunt) + Sonya Shirey (Jean's friend) + Diane (Jean's daughter's co-worker)
- *We pray for* **other neighbors, friends, and believers in need**, that God would heal, provide, and comfort.
- *We pray for* **a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit** upon our church, our community, our county, our nation, the Evangelical Congregational Church, and the church universal. *We pray for* the whole church to be filled with a spiritual zeal for worship, evangelism, and discipleship. **May the fires of revival fall!**
- ***We praise God* for all the prayers we've seen him answer and for his everlasting faithfulness!**